

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000716

SIPDIS

NSC FOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J.FRAZER
CAIRO FOR POL - J. MAXSTADT

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TAGS: PREL PGOV EPET MOPS NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA -- SSS DIRECTOR PREDICTS ENFORCEMENT ACTION IN WARRI

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter for reason
1.5 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. During an April 11 meeting with Ambassador Jeter, the Director General of the State Security Service, Kayode Are, (SSS) predicted a post-election "enforcement action" against Ijaw militants in the Warri area. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) Are contended there was more to the current unrest than mere competition over local governments. First both the Ijaw and Urhobos have demanded the redrafting of local government boundaries to reduce the number of Local Government Areas (LGAs) controlled by the smaller Itsekiri ethnic group. In Delta State, the Urhobos already controlled eight LGAs, the Ijaw dominated nine and the Itsekiri three. However, the three controlled by the Itsekiri held the oil. Consequently, the Ijaw and the Urhobo had been canvassing for a new delineation where each would gain one local government at Itsekiri expense, leaving the smaller group with only one LGA.

¶13. (C) Are said these demands were unreasonable. The real motive underlying this was the desire to evict the Itsekiri off this resource-laden land. However, the area is the core of the Itsekiri's ancient kingdom established six centuries ago. The Ijaw and Urhobo were adjacent only because the Itsekiri granted them privilege to occupy Itsekiri land many years ago. Now that the other two are larger and stronger they want to oust the Itsekiri from their ethnic patrimony. Thus, when the clamor to redraw the LGA boundaries fell on deaf ears, Ijaw militants took matters into their own hands. They began to raze villages and forcibly evict the Itsekiri. This exposed the real objective of the militant Ijaws, Are revealed. The Ijaws and Urhobos would not be satisfied with more local governments, they wanted control of the land which, in their worldview, meant direct control of the resources under it.

¶14. (C) The Ijaw thirst for the land had been whetted by their long-time participation in oil bunkering, Are added. That the Ijaws eventually threatened the oil installations was no accident. It was part and parcel of militant Ijaw chauvinism some ethnic leaders had been brewing. Unfortunately, the scores of unemployed youth proved to be fertile ground for this fermentation.

¶15. (C) Are stated that the Danjuma Commission established to look into the unrest was a placeholder, a mechanism to give the appearance that the GON was "talking to the parties." Are contended the GON could never meet the Ijaw's stated demands to reconfigure the LGA's. First, the scheme was unjust; second, the Itsekiri rightfully opposed it. Are declared the Commission's only real purpose was to persuade moderate Ijaw leaders to dissociate themselves from their more militant kin. By killing soldiers and innocent civilians, destroying villages and then jeopardizing the national economy by shutting the oil flow, the militants had gone too far in directly challenging the government. It would be impossible for the GON to negotiate with them without surrendering control of the area, and this would not be done.

¶16. (S) The Director General stated that the GON would not act prior to the election. After the election, he predicted an "enforcement action" was certain. During the interim, army intelligence officers were to

collect information on the identity and whereabouts of the Ijaw militants. With this information, Are hoped the Army could be more discriminate in its operations by seeking out key individuals and not attempting to raid whole villages.

16. (C) COMMENT: Are is a keen interlocutor who usually is on the mark. We believe this expose is no exception. We have previously stated that the Warri crisis presented the GON with little choice. By any estimation, the Ijaw militants have challenged the GON. Calling the situation a "localized rebellion," not too different from the "Warlordism" seen in Liberia and Sierra Leone would not be wholly off the mark. It would be difficult to imagine a negotiated settlement that could mollify the GON, the Ijaw and Itsekiri. Nigeria's vital national interests clearly are at stake. In this instance, a surgical, limited police action is an easily defensible option. However, the danger is that the Nigerian army has thus far proven itself woefully incapable of that degree of operational precision.

JETER